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SUBJECT: JEM TAKES KARNOI FROM GOS, SLA/MM

REF: A) KHARTOUM 652
B) KHARTOUM 621

11. (SBU) Summary: The Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) has taken Karnoi, North Darfur, from the Government of Sudan (GOS), and unconfirmed reports from SLA/Minni Minnawi cite fifty dead in the fighting over the last week near the Chadian border. Two years to the month after the signing of the Darfur Peace Agreement, Minni Minnawi and his movement find themselves at a critical juncture but are struggling to articulate their response. UNAMID released a statement on May 17 condemning the aggression. Embassy Khartoum urges that the U.S. release a similar condemnation of JEM actions - see proposed statement in paragraph 8. End summary.

12. (SBU) UNAMID confirmed that JEM took the North Darfur town of Karnoi from GOS forces on May 17, with Sudanese Armed Forces troops subsequently fleeing the town, but there were no reports of additional conflict on May 18. UNAMID condemned the JEM attacks on May 17, with Joint Special Representative Rodolphe Adada saying in a statement, "I call on all parties to the Darfur conflict to refrain from the use of violence, to seek a peaceful resolution to their problems, notably through the Doha process, and to work towards a cessation of hostilities." Arabic-language newspapers in Khartoum translated the boast by JEM leader Khalil Ibrahim that JEM intends to control all of Darfur.

13. (SBU) SLA/MM issued a protest letter on May 14, signed by Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) signatory Minnawi, complaining to the international community of JEM aggression in North Darfur. Accusing JEM of "being engaged in dangerous and irresponsible and unprovoked acts of aggression and atrocities," the statement said that JEM had used 270 vehicles and assistance from Chadian mercenaries to attack SLA/MM positions the previous week in Gorbora and east of Um Barro (two locations approximately 100 km east of the border with Chad.) In addition to extensive looting and civilian displacement, the statement claims that more than fifty civilians have died (Note: UNAMID has not yet confirmed the figure). Condemning the recent conflict as "terrorist conduct," Minnawi's statement continues to accuse JEM of seeking to destabilize Darfur for its advantage. "JEM intends to pursue and fan unprecedented internal conflict of all against all, family against family, clan against clan, tribe against tribe, and community against community."

14. (SBU) In his statement, Minnawi pointed the finger at several international actors, including UNAMID. "UNAMID as usual kept silent and did nothing to voice or report on any of these violations." Going beyond commonplace claims of Chadian assistance to the Kobe Zaghawa rebel movement, the statement alleges that JEM has received financial support provided by international Islamic organizations, and unspecified "Qatari assistance" as well. Regarding the relationship between Chad and JEM, the statement also rejects JEM's attempts to foil relations between Chad and Sudan, saying, "JEM is helping the destabilization and fragmentation of

Chad itself." The statement closes by requesting "prompt action" from the international community to pressure the governments of Sudan and Chad to normalize their relations and disown the recent JEM aggression in Darfur.

15. (SBU) Voices within Minnawi's movement have yet to coalesce around a single way forward, and while some SLA/MM insiders are counseling engagement with the GOS on the issue of JEM's offensive in Dar Zaghawa, some members of the movement are reminiscing about their days in armed conflict in Darfur. Seifeldin Haroun, former SLA/MM spokesman, described the inner circle of the movement as unable to make clear decisions or formulate a clear plan. Haroun said that Minnawi has been paralyzed into inaction as a result. Speaking with poloffs on May 17 in Khartoum, Haroun added that he is pressuring Minnawi's confidants and Minnawi himself to engage with the GOS on how to defeat JEM, but that Minnawi has no clear plan on how to deal with the recent changes on the ground. Issam Hama and Mohamed Adam, two working-level members of SLA/MM who are both former field combatants, told poloff on May 14 in Nyala that they are pushing for the movement to return to war. Reminding poloff of JEM's move to push SLA/MM from Muhajeriya, South Darfur in January of this year, Hama asked rhetorically, "Do we need to fight JEM forever?" Both said they were delivering their message up the ladder that their faction cannot stand idly by as JEM attacks GOS positions. They noted that JEM has already delivered a "with-us-or-against-us" message to Darfuri rebel factions.

16. (SBU) Ambassador Azouz Ennifar, deputy AU/UN Joint Chief Mediator for Darfur, urged that the international community condemn the JEM aggression in North Darfur. Citing Khalil Ibrahim's "arrogant" tone, Ennifar sees the recent escalation as dangerous because JEM has gained actual territory in Darfur at the exact moment that the

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Doha process appears to be stalling. Currently, no agreement has been reached on the once-promising prisoner exchange between the GOS and JEM that would form the backbone of any goodwill between the two parties. Describing the dispute as a "sticking point," Ennifar said that JEM continues to insist that the GOS release all JEM prisoners before a cessation of hostilities is signed, but the GOS is adamant that a phased release of prisoners can take place only after a cessation of hostilities is implemented. Ennifar believes that while previous agreements in Doha have depended on a measure of goodwill from Khartoum, goodwill will be hard to come by considering that the GOS has lost territory to JEM.

17. (SBU) Comment: For the time being, JEM seems to be more interested in fighting than in negotiating, as it attempts to demonstrate that it now controls territory in Darfur. Although the situation remains difficult to predict, JEM's stepped-up attacks on the GOS and SLA/MM lend Khalil Ibrahim forward momentum to stage attacks elsewhere in Darfur. With JEM poised for a potential march to El Fasher (though incursions into eastern Jebel Marra are more likely in the short term, as SLM/AW is unable to mount any defense against JEM's superior resources. Consequently it may allow JEM to occupy some parts of Jebel Marra unopposed) the GOS will most likely soon react with a bombing campaign against JEM.

18. (SBU) Comment continued: U.S. silence regarding JEM's attack on the sole DPA signatory (Minnawi) would be interpreted as tacit approval. For this reason, post suggests the following statement: "The United States condemns the recent attacks by the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) on DPA signatory SLM/Minni Minnawi's positions in North Darfur at Umm Barru, as well as subsequent attacks by JEM on Government of Sudan positions in North Darfur at Karnoi. Such attacks do nothing to advance the cause of peace in Darfur. Instead, they violate the spirit of the Doha peace process, and threaten the security that guarantees vital humanitarian assistance to Darfur. Two years after the signing of the Darfur Peace Agreement, we call on all parties to the conflict to end the violence and engage in constructive discussions on how to bring about a cessation of hostilities in Darfur." End comment.

ASQUINO